VOL. 131 No. 14 • THURSDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2025 North Texas Daily @NTDaily @NTDaily NTDAILY.COM

North Texas Daily

Serving the University of North Texas & Denton since 1916

Sports

Senior punter Sawyer Evans walks onto the field against Rice University at Rice Stadium in Houston, Texas on Nov. 22, 2025. **Photo by Ismael Beltran**

Sawyer Evans' maturity anchors team culture

By Haylie Stum
Senior Sports Writer

Senior punter Sawyer Evans said he has done a lot of growing up over the course of his football career.

From bouncing back and forth from the sport in high school to transferring universities to navigating a coaching change, the 24-year-old is no stranger to evolving amid change. His experience earned him one of three captain titles this season — a title that became increasingly important upon the news of head coach Eric Morris' exit, which broke before the team could meet.

From the outside looking in, many saw the situation as a huge roadblock for the team to overcome. Evans, who leans on his extensive trial experience, said it was another day in the office for him, helping to lead the Mean Green.

"The reality of today's college football world is everything's a one-year contract," Evans said. "All you're worried about is this year [...]. The facts are what they are, but that doesn't matter. We've come too far to let this just slip away because everyone's thinking about what's going to happen in January."

In North Texas' case in 2025, most attention is directed towards its Football Bowl Subdivision leading offense in scoring and total yardage. Its defense has accomplished a massive overhaul from the previous year as well, often leaving its special teams overshadowed.

From the mouth of the punter himself, the job is boring. It is a role he takes pride in on and off the field. However, it served as an essential cog to a machine going full-steam ahead toward program history.

"The fans don't want to see me go out on the field and punt the ball to the other team, but we've been really good with that this year, limiting return yards last year, same year before that," Evans said. "It's just about executing."

Evans did not always want to punt the ball away. He would rather take snaps as a quarterback in his freshman year at Arlington Martin High School.

SAWYER continues on page 6

What's Inside:

News pg.3

Interfaith Ministries provides community services during holiday season

Arts & Life pg.4

Freshman designer turns passion into patchworks

The Dose pg.5

Failing to hit the highs of the first film, 'Zootopia 2' is still a fun animated time at the theater

News

Starbucks union workers continue strike against alleged unfair labor practices

Attendees gather outside the picket line at Starbucks on S. Loop 288 on Nov. 22, 2025. **Photo by Katie Brackens**

By Shehzil Imran
News Editor

As the holiday season arrives, Denton's Starbucks Workers United members continue and escalate their longest open-ended strike against the company's alleged unfair union labor practices.

Vincente Martinez, a Denton resident and barista at the Starbucks Rayzor Ranch location for about six years, said the SBWU has been trying to negotiate with Starbucks for about three years on a new union contract, in which they ask for better working conditions, wages and healthcare.

"Jobs should be able to provide that, and anything else that anybody needs in life to be able to live adequately," Martinez said. "[...] A lot of people are like, 'Why don't you just quit your job?' And it's because I like my job. I just want to make it a little better for everyone."

The strike, which began on Red Cup Day on Nov. 13, known by the SBWU as the Red Cup Rebellion, involves over 120 stores across the United States. This includes Denton locations at Rayzor Ranch, Highway 380 and Hinkle and Loop 288. Since the strike started, SBWU workers have been picketing outside some stores daily, while also going back and forth between working at Starbucks and striking.

Maria Zaki, a Denton resident and barista at the Starbucks Highway 380 and Hinkle location for about three and a half years, said Starbucks could negotiate an agreed-upon contract with SBWU, with just around a day's worth of income from all baristas. However, Zaki said the company has not been meeting SBWU for a reasonable compromise at the negotiation table.

"After the unionization of the first store [in 2021], we've been looking to bargain for a contract, and we haven't had that contract in over two years," Zaki said. "And right now, after a culmination of a lot of bad faith efforts by Starbucks to come and bargain, we have gone to a point where this is necessary for us to reach a contract within good faith [...]."

STARBUCKS continues on page 2

Opinion

Letter from the Editor: Passing the mantle

By Gianna Ortner-Findlay
Editor-in-Chief

When I first started at the *North Texas Daily* in the fall of 2022, the dream of one day applying for Editor-in-Chief felt extremely far away. As most students know, and are constantly reminded during their first years at school, the time we have goes by fast.

Before I knew it, I was hitting apply and sitting before the Student Media Committee, on the verge of tears. While I had fought for my spot in every position I had held at the *Daily*, the role of editor-in-chief was different. It would be an opportunity to leave a lasting legacy and a mark on the heart of the *Daily*.

When I first received the notification that I would be editor-in-chief from former Editor-in-Chief Chris Moss in the spring, I asked him if he was serious. Anyone who has spent years wanting something understands the sense of suspended disbelief when you realize you have made your dream a reality.

As I sit down to write this letter after 16 weeks at the helm, I am left with a sort of slack-jawed speechlessness at everything we've been able to accomplish. While every editor-in-chief makes grand plans to change the Daily, most of us do not get through everything we had planned in the months we have to lead.

Despite this, we have hit some impressive milestones this semester. We explored new ways of storytelling and writing structure, broke the news 14 times (three before my tenure officially started) and, most importantly, told stories that resonated with our community.

While I might not have achieved all of my goals, I am immensely proud of what my team has accomplished. Though it saddens me to have to leave them at the end of this semester, I hope they know I will be cheering them on from the sidelines as an alumna.

Managing Editor Hannah Everett has been a rock in the storm. Through sleepless nights and countless hours, Everett's leadership skills have grown exponentially this semester. Everett will be stepping into the role of editor-in-chief in the spring and I am excited to see what she will do in the role. Her ability to remain calm under pressure and her dedication to the paper are evident in every position she has undertaken. She has unparalleled potential and I can not wait to see where she takes the paper next.

Editor-in-Chief Gianna Ortner-Findlay poses surrounded by previous issues on Dec. 1, 2025. **Photo by Aiden Gonzalez**

Aiden Gonzalez, back in his position as Digital Editor for another semester, has been flexible and multi-faceted. From frantic calls regarding breaking news to managing the *Daily's* multiple social and media accounts, Gonzalez has proven himself capable time and time again as an editor. It has been an honor to watch him grow alongside me as an editor for the last two years, and his leadership and knowledge of our publishing system have been invaluable.

Design Editor Mekielle Vaughn has been a teacher and a student this semester, shifting between graphic design styles and the *Daily's* style and dutifully hanging through late Tuesday nights to create the edition every week.

LETTER continues on page 8

North Texas Daily

Editorial Team

Editor-in-Chief
Gianna Ortner-Findlay
@giannae.ortner_reports

Managing Editor
Hannah Everett
@hannah.g.everett

Design Editor
Mekielle Vaughn
@notso_meek

Digital Editor
Aiden Gonzalez
@_xiden

News Editor
Shehzil Imran
@Shehzildoesjournalism

Arts & Life/The Dose Editor
Matthew Winter
@matthewwinter_journalism

Opinion Editor
Alejandra Osegueda

Video Editor
Cooper Collins
@cooper_videos

Photo Editor
Ismael Beltran
@izzyf1icks

Illustrations Editor
Victoria Maldonado
@esmerelda.vic

Sports Editor
Justin Na

Production Team

Page Designer
Janese Mashell
@janloumas

Copyeditor
Baylee Cantrell
@bayleeisonline

Copyeditor
Samantha Heath
@samdoesjournalism

Faculty Advisor
Randy Loftis
940-565-3495//Randy.Loftis@unt.edu

Scan to sign up for our weekly newsletter, *The Daily Digest*

Denton Starbucks Workers United union strike for improved working conditions, benefits and pay

STARBUCKS continued from page 1

Zaki said a major reason the SBWU is striking is to improve working conditions for employees at Starbucks stores. Zaki said she has witnessed unfair practices at her unionized location, such as an employee under the age of 18 allegedly having to "get on her knees" and clean up feces behind the store's dumpsters, which she said is "incredibly unsafe."

The day before the strike, Zaki said the store's district managers had implemented a "lockout," meaning they would schedule multiple baristas for the entire day and fully close the store in the middle of the day. Zaki said that when store operations halt, baristas are often not given an explanation, nor are baristas scheduled later in the day informed, which is another example of labor practices the SBWU is striking against.

"They guarantee those baristas those hours, and then took them away, which in itself is illegal," Zaki said. "[Starbucks] has been altering [schedules] within a week of a given shift, playing with people's livelihoods."

In addition to lockouts, Amethyst Brewster, Denton resident and shift supervisor at Starbucks Highway 380 and Hinkle location, said SBWU members are also asking the company for better wages. The current pay for Starbucks baristas is usually $15 an hour, which Brewster acknowledges is better than other jobs.

However, Zaki said, in addition to employees' schedules suddenly changing, Starbucks managers tend to schedule baristas to work 19.5 hours, which is just below the required 20 hours to receive work benefits.

According to the Starbucks website, employees who are scheduled 20 hours or more a week are entitled to benefits such as healthcare — medical, dental and vision —, tuition coverage, stocks and savings plans and paid time off.

"A lot of people aren't able to keep the benefits of their health insurance [and] their college compensation," Zaki said. "Many of the things that they rely on to support themselves and to support their family. [...] We can't have health insurance if we aren't scheduled the hours for it. We can't have the resources that we need if we're not scheduled for it."

Photo by Katie Brackens

Another reason Brewster said she believes the Starbucks pay should be increased is that there are often not enough baristas on the floor relative to the amount of labor contributed and the number of customers served. Brewster said even when there are two or fewer baristas, the store is not permitted to close.

Brewster said she believes Starbucks workers need a higher wage. She also shared a similar concern with Zaki about employees being expected to clean up biohazards and save money on professional cleaning crews, despite the Starbucks policy requiring to hire a crew.

"Even though we're getting paid $15, we're doing the work of two, three people," Brewster said. "So it doesn't feel the same. The mental, the physical load, it's unmatched. Starbucks is a whole different animal of its own."

According to The National Law Review, Starbucks said the strike has so far caused little impact on day-to-day operations. The company said they experienced a less than one percent disruption on Red Cup Day, and over 240,000 Starbucks employees came out that day to work.

As the strike continues, USA Today reported that Starbucks said about 29 of the original striking stores have reopened. However, Zaki said SBWU has stated that the strike will continue until an agreement can be reached with Starbucks.

"What we need right now is for Starbucks to put out proposals that are within good faith," Zaki said. "They cannot give us something that's one percent of the 100 percent that we're asking. If you're going to bargain with someone, you're going to hope to get 50-50. [...] At the end, a union is a democracy in the workplace, that's all it is, it's giving voice to the people that are there."

NEWS AROUND TEXAS

By Shehzil Imran
News Editor

Throughout December and into January, 10 new Texas bills will take effect. Here are a few of the Texas laws that will go into effect on Dec. 4:

House Bill 7 to allow private citizens to sue abortion drug distributors and manufacturers

Also known as the Woman and Child Protection Act, House Bill 7 will limit Texans' ability to receive abortion-inducing drugs. If an individual takes the abortion drugs, they cannot be sued. However, private citizens will be able to sue companies that manufacture or distribute abortion-inducing drugs to Texas. If the citizen suing is related to the fetus, they can be awarded at least $100,000 in damages. If the fetus is unrelated to the individual, the citizen will receive 10 percent of the damages and is ordered to donate the remaining amount to charity.

Senate Bill 8 to categorize private spaces utilized by transgender people in public buildings by assigned sex at birth

After multiple efforts by the Texas Legislature to pass sex-based restrictions, Senate Bill 8, known as the "Bathroom Bill," will take effect and restrict people to spaces, such as prisons, family violence shelters, public schools and government buildings, based on their birth sex. Public buildings that do not comply with the new restriction may be subject to a $25,000 fine for the first violation and a $125,000 fine for each subsequent violation. The bill is also known as the Texas Women's Privacy Act, as lawmakers supporting SB 8 argue that the law is intended to protect women. In contrast, those opposed argue the law will put transgender people in danger of prosecution.

House Bill 18 to create harsher penalties for Texas lawmakers who intentionally break quorum

House Bill 18 aims to impose harsher punishments on lawmakers who deliberately break quorum to delay legislative action. The law will revoke seniority, implement more fines and limit the funds that these lawmakers can raise during session breaks. While taking effect Dec. 4, HB 18 was passed in August during a special session. During this session, multiple Texas House Democrats broke quorum and temporarily left Texas to delay legislative action on a new congressional redistricting map pushed by state Republicans.

Senate Bill 11 to protect trafficking victims from being persecuted for less serious offenses

Senate Bill 11 will allow for trafficking victims to be protected from persecution for specific offenses committed against their will. If the victim can prove the crime was done under the trafficker's demand or coercion, they can be shielded from charges. However, this does not include more serious crimes, such as sexual assault, burglary, murder and trafficking of an individual or child.

Interfaith Ministries provides community services during holiday season

By Ty Scott
Staff Writer

As temperatures drop in winter, Denton organization Interfaith Ministries provides programs and weather kits to residents, equipping them with resources for unexpected situations during the season.

Among the resources available, Keri Caruthers, executive director of Interfaith Ministries and university alumna, said the organization is providing limited financial assistance to those who can not pay their utility bills in full.

"Our biggest program [is] that we help with is electricity and utilities," Caruthers said. "[...] If people come to Denton Municipal, they say 'Hey I can not afford my bill,' municipal sends them here and we qualify them."

Caruthers said that to qualify for this support, people must provide their utility bill and a form of identification, as a lack of documentation can make it difficult to receive resources. Caruthers said events are held to help people get their documentation and the resources they need.

"We had a 'pay off your bill blitz,'" Caruthers said. "So people who are behind on their Atmos bills [...] could come in one day on a Saturday all they had to do was show their bill and their drivers license to show it was really them on the account."

To continue offering programs such as financial relief for utility bills, Interfaith Ministries partners with utility companies such as Atmos Energy.

"We are a natural gas-only distributor, and [we] safely deliver reliable, affordable, efficient and abundant natural gas to more than 3.3 million distribution customers [...]," said John Manganilla, Atmos public affairs manager and university alumnus. "For us, I believe the largest challenge is understanding where the biggest need in a community exists and finding the right partners to help bringing solutions to those in need."

Interfaith Ministries executive director Keri Caruthers talks abut the inventory room on Nov. 26, 2025. **Photo by Trennt Rhea**

Caruthers said Interfaith Ministries is grateful for the support it has received from Atmos, as the money can help expand its efforts to reach more people and partner with other organizations.

Independently, Interfaith Ministries also provides the public with resources, such as weather kits. These weather kits contain items to combat the cold weather and save money on utilities. Weather stripping tape, water-conserving shower heads and energy-conserving lightbulbs are just a few of the supplies the weather kit provides.

Caruther said she believes Interfaith Ministries will be able to meet the community's demands by partnering with organizations that share similar causes.

"This year Atmos has given us over $100,000 for the 2026 cycle," Caruthers said. "With that money we are tasked with helping other agencies who may need that money. For instance, Hearts for Homes, and they have a senior citizen in a house and they are having trouble with a gas water heater. We can help with that."

While partnering with other groups helps these organizations meet demands, Shawnett Viani, a case management specialist and disabilities advocate, said it is more complicated due to an ongoing housing issue in North Texas.

"There is a trend that there is a lack of housing help for people," Viani said. "That is really causing a lot of other issues, and people want help for that housing, because it is more scary to lose your housing. I think they tend to forget to look for help with utilities instead."

Caruthers said she agrees with Viani that the lack of housing assistance is contributing to their high demand for resources. Without addressing housing issues in Denton, she said her organization's support will continue to be needed.

The support Interfaith Ministries has been providing for the community is part of the group's "Sharing the Warmth" initiative, which is meant to help residents keep their electricity bills low during winter. Interfaith Ministries supports residents in Denton, Corinth and some parts of Lake Dallas. With a little more funding, Caruthers said she believes they can do a lot more.

"Just growing the services that we have is the best focus right now," Caruthers said. "Because what we do, we do really well. We just need a little more money and a little more funding. My biggest grant as of late has been from Atmost. Everyone else has been giving twenty-five hundred here, five-thousand there."

Manganilla said Atmos wants to meet the demands of all its customers, which can be difficult when meeting profit quotas. However, he said the partnership has been going well.

"The right community partners are vital," Manganilla said. "To the success of the various programs we fund through our Fueling Safe and Thriving Communities program. We are always looking for community organizations that we can partner with to help expand our positive community impact."

North Texas Daily
Paid Staff Application
APPLICATIONS CLOSE
DEC. 12 AT NOON

Friends with Benefits hosts first-ever Denton Beard Pick-A-Thon at the Bearded Monk

By Sophia Carbajal
Senior Arts & Life Writer

Contestants compete in the Beard Pick-A-Thon event at The Bearded Monk on Nov. 30, 2025. **Photo by Sophia Carbajal**

In the afternoon on Sunday, Nov. 30, a couple dozen people counted down from 10 as four people frantically stuck toothpicks into competitors' beards in hopes of having the highest number.

The Beard Pick-A-Thon competition was held at The Bearded Monk and featured four men with different-length beards up for the challenge. After almost an hour, the Beard Pick-A-Thon winner, 43-year-old Denton resident Mark Klingele, shook over 1,200 toothpicks from his beard in celebration.

"It got heavy," Klingele said. "I got stuck a few times in the face, but you know, for the love of the game. It was great and it was gratifying getting them out."

The four participating teams were composed of three roles: The Beard, the man with the beard, The Picker, whose job was to place the toothpicks into the beard and The Skipper, the group's coach and hype man. The event was organized by the Denton charity group Friends with Benefits and its co-founder, 40-year-old Mindy Arendt, who provided over 10,000 toothpicks for the contestants.

The first round of the Beard Pick-A-Thon began at 3:10 p.m. and ended after 30 minutes of concentrated and fast-paced toothpick sticking. The second round was significantly shorter and the teams had only 10 minutes to add as many toothpicks as they could.

While the end goal was simple, each Picker had a different strategy and way of placing the toothpicks. Klingele's girlfriend, local artist Monique McIntyre, served as the team's Picker and used both hands to interweave two toothpicks into Klingele's beard at once.

McIntyre said she was not trying to put each toothpick in perfectly and instead focused on speed.

"I was doing multiple," McIntyre said. "I'm ambidextrous so I was like 'how many can I put in there?'"

The Beard Pick-A-Thon was not just a fun competition, but was also about raising money for the Battering Intervention and Prevention Program, a service offered by Denton County Friends of the Family. BIPP provides counseling services to abusers and educates people on how to foster safe and healthy relationships.

Beard Pick-A-Thon attendees could wager on which team they thought would win and purchase a fake beard for five dollars to wear during the competition. One hundred percent of the proceeds from these two activities were donated to the BIPP program. Arendt said she chose the BIPP program to pair with the Beard Pick-A-Thon event in hopes of reaching members of its target audience.

"We wanted [the event] to benefit something that had a benefit to men, like we wanted to make sure it was male focused and we're big on therapy and people changing their ways, so we were like 'that's a perfect program,'" Arendt said.

McIntyre said the main reason she and Klingele wanted to participate in the Beard Pick-A-Thon was to support Friends With Benefits.

"I just thought it would be fun and I love Friends With Benefits," McIntyre said. "It's so great and Mindy is always doing these great things."

The owner of The Bearded Monk, 43-year-old Ben Esely, said events like the Beard Pick-A-Thon that positively impact people on a larger scale are always welcome at his bar. Esely said that events like these make Denton unique.

"It's not just because it's stupid and weird and frivolous and fun, it's charity and we have fun and actually make a difference," Esely said. "That's why I love these people."

Arendt said FWB plans to host this event again next year to continue supporting positive services like the BIPP program in fun, stress-free ways. Arendt hopes the Beard Pick-A-Thon will gain traction and become a huge event in the coming years.

"At first year events, especially for weird stuff like this, you have to show people how much fun it is and work out all the kinks," Arendt said. "I thought it was a great first year."

Things To Do:

DANCE RX [Rubber Room]

When: Friday, Dec. 5 at 9 p.m.
Where: Rubber Gloves Rehearsal Studios, 411 E. Sycamore St.
What: Dance RX debuts at Rubber Gloves Rehearsal Studio. DJs Vanden and INTERNETMORGUE will be playing pop music in the Rubber Room. With what they call iconic bangers – from Charli XCX to Britney, to lost remixes and classic deep cuts. Tickets are $10, entry is 18 and up.

Holiday Lighting Festival

When: Saturday, Dec. 6 at 3 p.m.
Where: Quakertown Park 700 Oakland St.
What: The Denton Holiday Lighting Festival lights up Civic Center & Quakertown Park with music, dancing, food, drinks, Santa, snow hill, trackless train and what they call holiday magic. All access and VIP wristbands are available for purchase. Wristbands can be pre-ordered online and picked up the night of the festival at the Information Booth. Wristbands can also be purchased during the event.

Rushadicus the Cello Goblin

When: Wednesday, Dec. 10 at 9 p.m.
Where: Rubber Gloves Rehearsal Studios, 411 E. Sycamore St.
What: Rushadicus the infamous Cello Goblin from the land of Sneth jicks forth with his immersive, experimental - cello and kazoo fueled - performance art extravaganza. An evening of cello metal, goblin tricks, virtuosic multi-instrumental feats and chaotic merriment. With local support from Joey Z, tickets will be $15 day of show.

Freshman designer turns passion into patchworks

By Caitlyn Ybarra
Staff Writer

When freshman marketing major Morgan La Penna submitted her T-shirt design for her high school's competition, she never imagined it would turn into a brand that could be found all over the country and in the closets of 14 NFL cheerleaders.

La Penna, the sole operator of Stitched by BloxZ, works around the clock, fulfilling orders from her home and shipping them from her dorm room.

"I just submitted [the design] for fun, didn't really think anything of it," La Penna said. "Once I found out I won [...] I was like, 'Wait, I could maybe try to start something with this.'"

Her brand features personalized patchworks for hoodies, hats, jeans and plushes. Working one-on-one with each customer, La Penna strives to personalize her designs to each customer's interests and hobbies.

"They give me ideas, I'm like, 'Perfect!' and we can just hop off of each other's ideas," La Penna said.

La Penna sews and designs each piece of clothing and said she believes her brand has come to represent more than just colorful patchworks. Whether the patches are of track shoes, pompoms or school logos, La Penna takes the time to understand precisely what it is her customers want.

"For me, it's all new every time," La Penna said. "I get to dive into something that I never learned about. There's an aerospace one I did and I was like, 'I never heard about this or seen this.'"

As the sole operator, La Penna has had to navigate a variety of operations that come with running a small business.

"I have to learn how to be a social media person, I have to learn how to use TikTok, learn the algorithm," La Penna said. "I just have to force myself to put myself out there and talk about these things, and I have to act like I have a million followers when I really don't."

Kelly Mitchell, business professor and the faculty advisor for the North Texas Entrepreneurship Club, emphasizes the power of utilizing social media and artificial intelligence for small business owners.

"I think it's important as we move forward for small businesses to embrace," Mitchell said.

While these efforts most likely occur unbeknownst to followers, La Penna has an understanding for when and what to post of her work to maximize her viewership best.

Her most popular video has almost 380,000 views on TikTok. The pinned video documents the process of making a hoodie for Brenley Herrera, a current Dallas Cowboys cheerleader.

"That one was like the really big turning point for me and my brand," La Penna said. "That's what took off and that's what got me 3,000 followers in the two weeks that I did it. It was just a big achievement for me."

One of La Penna's most recent projects came when Herrera reached back out to commission nine more hoodies as a group gift to her fellow cheerleaders.

"It's different because it's going to girls of multiple followers and they have recognition all over the world," La Penna said. "This [project] was definitely like a bigger project because it was going to get my products a bigger audience."

Sophomore psychology major Cortney Murray, a friend and customer of La Penna, appreciates the personalization each piece offers.

Stitched by BloxZ owner Morgan La Penna poses for a photo with her custom patchwork designs inside Willis Library on Dec. 1, 2025. **Photo by Gianna Ortner-Findlay**

"You get to pick the things that represent you and for the designs, she will customize it to each person and she will take you into account," Murray said.

Being a college student, however, La Penna's operations have slowed as she balances academics and campus involvement. Despite the challenges, Murray believes La Penna's passion for the brand and strong work ethic will keep the business growing.

"I have seen her kind of adapt and allow [the brand] to shift and grow with her, and for that reason, I think it's going to stick with her for a very long time," Murray said.

Failing to hit the highs of the first film, 'Zootopia 2' is still a fun animated time at the theater

By Carson Kelly
Staff Writer

In a world that features a wide range of animals, "Zootopia 2" (2025) is expectedly a mixed bag of a film. Not as successful or innovative as its 2016 predecessor, it still offers an entertaining enough experience to make it worthwhile.

Being the first ever bunny and fox police partners in the history of Zootopia, expectations from the force are high for Judy Hopps (Ginnifer Goodwin) and Nick Wilde (Jason Bateman). For "Zootopia 2," they have once again uncovered a region-wide case of fraud that could shatter the city from within.

Just like the first film, "Zootopia 2" has a breathtaking world. The central idea of the franchise, combined with its animation, offers boundless creativity. That creativity shines in moments and is not really there at other times.

Every minute is a visual gag or a reference to real-life animal equivalents represented in the film. The movie is a brilliant, well-thought-out film in fleshing out the world of Zootopia and making it feel real and lived-in.

Where the film lags is in the elements surrounding the world. Hopps and Wilde still have their tried-and-true dynamic, derived from buddy cop films. However, it fails to develop them beyond where they left off at the end of the first film.

Illustration by Victoria Maldonado

Goodwin and Bateman perform like the characters were written for them. As a reformed con-fox who could talk his way out of any bind, Bateman is the perfect actor to pull it off. Naturally dry yet quick-witted, he delivers a performance aimed at adults in the audience.

Goodwin is endearing as Hopps and believable as the rule-following, overly eager bunny. As the emotional center of the story, it works less effectively this time around than in the first film. That is not indicative of Goodwin's performance, but rather of her character's progression from a writing standpoint.

Their relationship in the movie hits a rough patch as the honeymoon period is short-lived. Their opposing personalities lead to friction between them. Unfortunately, this strain is shallow in its writing.

It visually uses the carrot-shaped recorder that saved the day in the first film to represent their relationship. It reappears multiple times throughout the film and goes through moments that tell the audience rather than show how their relationship is at that moment. If it is rocky, then the carrot is beat up, if the carrot is clean then the relationship is good.

Ke Huy Quan (Gerry De'Snake) is adorable as the first snake in the franchise. There is a puppy-like quality to both his voice acting and the character's design. The only downside is that he is not as embedded in the film, unable to get his fangs into the story.

Corruption is the norm for the city of Zootopia. Investigating a criminal plot to steal the original diary of the Lynxley family, Hopps and Wilde uncover something far bigger than a simple robbery. For better or worse, it is similar in structure to the first film.

The world of "Zootopia" has always had political undertones throughout both films. The message, which addresses themes of redlining and other discriminatory practices, is especially relevant in the United States. It does not quite feel as fresh as other films dealing with similar themes, but it is still intelligent and fun nonetheless.

The film expands the world by introducing a region that features water mammals and reptiles. Feeling unique and intriguing, the region features dynamic relationships between the environment and the characters that inhabit it.

Directors Jared Bush and Byron Howard have an understanding of the world that keeps the film afloat and occasionally soaring. They both have a clear eye for the ins and outs that make it such an interesting and successful franchise for Disney.

"Zootopia 2" does the job of a standard sequel. It expands the world a little bit and allows for further expansion in the future. However, on its own, it fails to establish itself and escape the shadow of the first film. The first film established such a concrete formula that it could rely on it here.

Carson's rating: 3/5

Icon of the Week:

Martha Stewart

Credit **David Shankbone**

Martha Helen Stewart is the *North Texas Daily*'s icon of the week for her tenure of a cookbook author. The daughter of two teachers, she was born into a family with six siblings, her being the second oldest, in Jersey City, New Jersey in Aug. 3, 1941.

She graduated from Nutley High School, New Jersey, during this time as a student she would make money via modeling. After being a model, and later a stockbroker, she used the skills instilled upon her as a child to begin cooking.

Going on to curate several cookbooks, articles, listicles and columns, she would also make appearances on national television shows such as "The Oprah Winfrey Show" (1998) and "Larry King Live" (1985).

She has won the Golden Plate Award, Edison Achievement Award, been inducted into the New Jersey Hall of Fame and Licensing International Hall of Fame.

6 sweet and savory treats to make at home with family and friends

By Janese Mashell
Page Designer

The holidays are here: a time for cooler weather, heavy coats, warm fires and spending time with loved ones. This season is also the finest for baking sweet and savory treats.

From scrumptious cookies to mouthwatering sandwiches, here are six of the best treats in no particular order to make at home with family and friends.

Chocolate chip cookies

Starting simple, chocolate chip cookies are a staple for the holidays. Flour, brown sugar and a hint of salt are some of the essential ingredients for the recipe, providing the color and structure. Yet, the most essential ingredient for chocolate chip cookies is the chocolate chips themselves. The more there is, the gooier and sweeter the cookie.

A recipe from Allrecipes says to leave the cookies in the oven for eight to 10 minutes, so do just that. Once taken out of the oven, they will continue to bake and cool down on their own. If left in the oven for too long, the chocolate chip cookies will be unpleasant to bite through.

Red velvet cookies

Now, imagine a red velvet cake baked into something smaller, circular and with white chocolate chips. Introducing red velvet cookies. In a recipe from Live Well Bake Often, the cookies require slightly more effort than the chocolate chip cookies. Red velvet cake mix is the base, not red food coloring, since tasting the cake flavor and texture is key. The cake base also makes the cookie rise higher than regular chocolate chip cookies.

Mixing is another difference. The cake batter becomes sticky, making it difficult to stir with a regular wooden or baking spoon. An electric mixer is recommended for an easier process. Use white chocolate chips to mirror the cream seen on red velvet cakes.

Reindeer chow

Santa is always left with snacks to fuel him up for his travels, but there is the issue of what the reindeer could eat. The good news is that a snack does exist for them. Reindeer chow is a treat for reindeer and humans alike to enjoy. Think of regular Chex Mix, but only with the actual Chex and pretzels, combined with other snacks and white chocolate.

Reindeer chow contains pretzels, peanut M&Ms, Rice Chex, Cheerios, unsalted peanuts and white chocolate. Coconut oil is optional. There is a recipe from Erin Lives Whole that does not require using an oven. Mixing the dry ingredients, drizzling them with melted white chocolate chips and cooling them in the fridge for 30 minutes is the way to go.

As the white chocolate cools, it hardens and sticks the dry ingredients together like glue. Reindeer chow is also a perfect grab-and-go snack.

Ranch oyster crackers

Now on to savory. Ranch oyster crackers require the least amount of effort out of all the treats from this list. All that is necessary are oyster crackers, ranch seasoning, vegetable oil, chopped dill and lemon pepper to add the tang.

Once the last four ingredients are mixed in a bowl, add them to a large bag of oyster crackers and shake them. Then, spread the contents onto a baking pan and bake for 15 to 20 minutes to get the toasty flavor. Ranch oyster crackers are often paired with tomato soup and are a great stand-alone snack.

Sausage balls

Next, sausage balls. This recipe requires three ingredients: ground sausage, shredded cheddar cheese and biscuit mix. The best part about making the treat is that no utensils are needed. The meat, cheese and biscuit mix is kneaded together, so prepare for the smell of cold meat to follow on one's hands long after.

Roll the mixture into balls and pop them in the oven for 20 to 25 minutes. When bitten into, the cheese pulls out into a string. Sausage balls are so savory that it is hard to stop eating just one.

Ham and cheese sliders

Last, but not least, are ham and cheese sliders. This treat is the ace of the entire list, considering its usage of sweet and savory elements. All that is needed are slices of ham and cheese, butter, Hawaiian rolls, poppy seeds and various sauces and seasonings.

First, cut the rolls in half without separating the bread one by one. Then, overlap the ham and cheese on one half and place the other half on top to create the slider. Use a pastry brush to paint the wet mixture and poppy seeds onto the buns. Cover the sliders with foil and bake until the cheese melts.

The liquid mixture seeps between the sliders, coating the entire treat with savory flavor and preserving the sweetness of the Hawaiian rolls. Ham and cheese sliders are the star shareable treats for the holiday season.

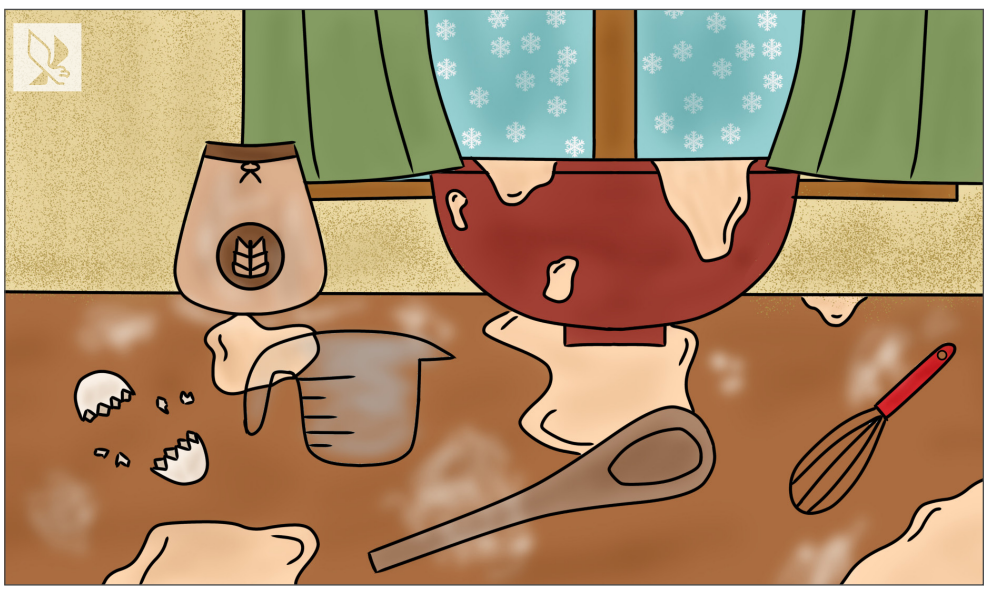

Illustration by Janese Mashell

Senior punter proves vital to leadership through experience

SAWYER continued from page 1

At the time, he felt his opportunities in the position were unfair, causing him to give up the sport altogether for a two-year stint.

"I had these made up problems in my head and thought I had problems with the coaches and stuff," Evans said. "I took that in sophomore and junior year and grew up a little bit and realized, 'Dude, there was nothing going on. You're just being arrogant.'"

Evans could never fully get football out of his mind during that period, leading him to serve in an equipment management role for the team to be around the sport. He finally decided to rekindle his flame for playing his senior year of high school. He tried to become Arlington Martin's signal caller yet again, but instead found his fit by volunteering to fill the team's vacant punter spot.

Although the position was not always his first choice, it was always in the back of his mind, with a knack for kicking hard in soccer and having a brother who kicked for both Baylor and Purdue. Despite not having any proper training in the role, Evans went on to become a first-team all-district selection as Arlington Martin's punter in 2018.

Evans saw a future as a specialist and took a gap year between high school, which helped him arrive at Texas Southern University in March of 2020. He punted as a Tiger for two seasons before entering his name into the transfer portal — a decision he made in pursuit of a challenge and a change of scenery.

Just a few days later, former North Texas special teams coach Chris Petrilli connected with Evans, offering him the opportunity to compete with others for the starting punter job.

Evans presented as a redshirt for the 2022 season with the Mean Green, learning from senior punter Bernardo Rodriguez at the time and learning the North Texas system. When it finally came time for Evans to have a shot at the spot, in came Morris with a brand new staff to accompany him.

In the transfer portal era of collegiate athletics, change within a program often prompts players to leave. Evans was the exception.

"I wanted to stay here," Evans said. "I said, 'Whoever comes in, I'm going to win them over and win this job next year' [Special teams coordinator Drew Svoboda] came in and had high expectations, even higher than the previous staff, which I really liked. He brought in some competition, but I just kept working, kept grinding. I ended up beating [them] out that year. Then, [Svoboda] committed to me being his guy for the next two years after that."

Currently in his third year as North Texas' primary punter, Evans has punted for 4,281 yards, averaging 41.6 yards per punt across his career. He led the Mean Green to the second-best punt return defense in the nation in 2024, allowing under two yards per punt return, and also earned second-team all-conference selection in 2023.

His role as a specialist may not be as flashy as the Mean Green's other phases of the game, but his proven consistency and dedication have been something North Texas has leaned on in an era of constant transformation.

Credit **Mean Green Sports**

"Sawyer feels like he's been here for 20 years," Svoboda said.

Through his six years of playing collegiate football, Evans has been through it all, an experience that has helped provide an anchor for the team's young talent. Redshirt freshman quarterback Drew Mestemaker, freshman running back Caleb Hawkins and sophomore receiver Wyatt Young are just a few of the young players North Texas features in its starting lineup.

"The cool thing for me, nowadays in the transfer portal in my opinion, [is having] a guy like Gabe Blair and Sawyer Evans, that come out that have played so much and been through a lot," Morris said. "They've been through not only the good but some of the bad around here, and I've watched them grow into a leadership role here."

Evans impacts the game through field positioning and other factors, but also impacts his team off the field by helping his teammates stay focused on contributing to a winning culture. It is one of many lessons he has learned along the way, and he hopes him staying true to North Texas through it all pays dividends in his final year.

"I told the guys before this season, 'This is the best roster that I've been a part of, and we've got a shot to do it this year,'" Evans said. "Everyone started giggling, but no, I envisioned coming here and winning championships. [...] I expected everything to change when I got here, and it's exactly how I would have hoped it would have gone."

Athlete of the Week:

Je'Shawn Stevenson

Credit **Mean Green Sports**

One of a few Cleveland State transfers who arrived with head coach Daniyal Robinson, sophomore guard Je'Shawn Stevenson has scored a team-leading average of 17 points per game. In his last three games with North Texas men's basketball, Stevenson has scored 26, 23 and 15 points, averaging 21.3 points. His season-high 26-point night came on Nov. 25 against Eastern Washington with 8-for-16 shooting and six rebounds. He followed up that day with his 23-point night just five days later. On Dec. 1 he earned the American Conference Player of the Week for his performances. Stevenson's overall offensive contributions this year build upon last season where he averaged 9.8 points per game off the bench for the Vikings. That season he won the Horizon League Freshman of the Year while not starting a single game for Cleveland State.

Senior forward Dylan Arnett embraces new opportunity with North Texas men's basketball

By Dante Longoria & Antonio Contreras
Staff Writers

On Nov. 9, North Texas played Loyola Chicago in a scene resembling a family reunion for senior forward Dylan Arnett. In the stands sat his immediate family, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, childhood best friends and high school coaches all in attendance.

The Ramblers just drove to the rim for a game-tying layup with 3.7 seconds left to play, with the score sitting at 62-62. With North Texas electing to forego using their last timeout, sophomore forward Reece Robinson sped up the court and found Arnett near the foul line as the final seconds elapsed.

Contested by two Loyola defenders, Arnett elevated and fired a 16-foot jumpshot without hesitation to sink a game-winner at the buzzer for a 64-62 victory. The shot sent his teammates, coaches and supporters into a frenzy as they celebrated Arnett, the moment and the win.

"It felt like a dream," Arnett said. "To hit that shot in a college game back home, with 60 people in my family there, that was one of the greatest experiences of all time."

As a Chicago-native, Arnett grew up in the area and attended DePaul College Prep, where he was coached by Tom Kleinschmidt, whom he refers to as a "Chicago legend."

Flexibility was something Arnett quickly needed in the offseason following his senior year. He had originally committed to the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, but on March 2, 2022, news broke that the program had fired its head coach. His recruitment with the program then fell through late in the process.

However, simultaneously to the firing, head coach Daniyal Robinson had just started his first year at Cleveland State and called Arnett that summer. The pair have not been separated since.

"He's a guy that carries the culture in the locker room," Daniyal Robinson said. "Dylan's like family, I've only been a head coach for four years and he's been with me every step of the way.

For Arnett, the opportunity to prove himself after his previous plans fell apart was enough to commit to Daniyal Robinson and his program.

"He thought I was a high character guy and offered me a spot on his team," Arnett said. "Even before I took the visit, I knew I was going to commit there. He really took a chance on me and I'll remember that for the rest of my life."

During his tenure at Cleveland State, Arnett's role and production on the court continued to flourish each season. In his rookie campaign, learning behind skilled veterans, Arnett averaged just under five minutes of playing time off the bench.

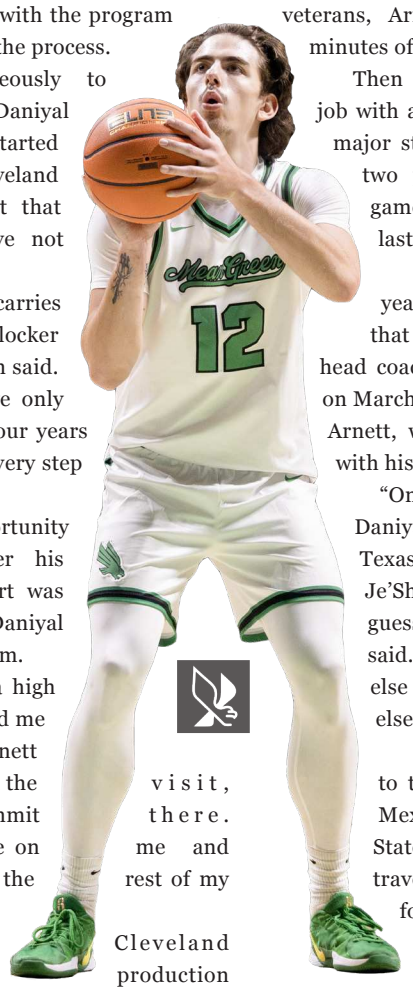

Photo by Ismael Beltran

Then he took on a full-time starter job with a tremendous uptick across each major statistical category over the next two years, logging 11.3 points per game and a team-high 7.1 rebounds last season.

Following the conclusion of last year's season, it was announced that Daniyal Robinson accepted the head coach position for the Mean Green on March 30. The outcome was simple for Arnett, who had already entrusted him with his future once before.

"Once I got the notification that Daniyal Robinson got hired at North Texas, I ran to [sophomore guard] Je'Shawn [Stevenson] and told him 'I guess we're going to Texas,'" Arnett said. "I didn't take calls from anyone else or think about going anywhere else. I knew I was coming here."

The team opened with a 2-0 start to the year, steamrolling past New Mexico Highlands and Northwestern State at home. Then North Texas traveled to Loyola Chicago on Nov. 9 for its first road game of the season, where Arnett sank his game-winner back home, at the Genesis of his basketball journey.

Watching the shot sink on the court right alongside Arnett was Stevenson, who also hails from the Chicago area and transferred in from Cleveland State. He said the moment was unforgettable because of their shared connection to the area.

"I was dog tired," Stevenson said. "I played a lot in that game and I had around 60 people there as well, being from Chicago too. I was mentally preparing myself for overtime and I told him that's the best basketball moment I've ever been a part of up to this point in my life, just what it meant to both of us."

Arnett's shot was featured at No. 7 on that night's edition of SportsCenter's Top 10 Plays and kept the Mean Green's unbeaten start alive. Since the game-winner, Arnett picked up a couple more accolades, playing in his 100th collegiate career game on Sunday, Nov. 30, against Prairie View A&M while grabbing his 500th career rebound.

The markers stand as the latest accomplishments in Arnett's basketball journey that required adapting and learning ever since he first laced up his basketball sneakers freshman year of high school.

While visible as obstacles, Arnett said those were the same reasons he fell in love with the sport to begin with.

"Once I started, I felt like I was getting better and better," Arnett said. "I really just love basketball, love the pace of it. I think you can see improvement quicker [than other sports], the more you work at it."

Head coach Eric Morris speaks publicly for first time since accepting Oklahoma State University job

By Haylie Stum
Senior Sports Writer

The feet of the media impatiently tapped, awaiting the conference room door to open. The anticipation had been building since Tuesday, Nov. 25, when the announcement of head coach Eric Morris taking the job at Oklahoma State threw a curveball into the Mean Green's major league season.

Despite a 52-25 win over Temple University on Friday, Nov. 28, excitement for the postgame availability stemmed not only from the team's performance but also the national interest around the head coach's move. For the first time, the public would get a shot at bringing a carousel of assumptions and questions to a halt.

And they did, as Morris answered every inquiry head-on. It was not just the head coach who provided a glimpse inside the program, as players spoke on the news and its impact on the rest of the season. Here is everything to take away from the most important press conference of the year.

Head coach Eric Morris watches the replay against UTSA at DATCU Stadium on Oct. 18, 2025. **Photo by Ismael Beltran**

Morris' feelings on how the news was broken: apologetic

The nature of the announcement detailing Morris' decision seemed to bother the Mean Green fanbase. With the news going public days before a must-win game against Temple and before the North Texas players were informed, frustration and confusion ran rampant.

Morris provided clarity amidst the chaos, stating that the team already had a meeting scheduled but did not anticipate the news reaching his players before telling them.

"I was not [prepared]," Morris said. "So disappointing in a lot of different ways."

Morris said the public announcement served as a distraction that the players overcame against Temple. However, he feels the most remorse for not getting to speak with the Mean Green beforehand.

"I apologized to our team that they didn't hear that from me," Morris said. "And to be quite honest with you, it's something I'll have to live with for the rest of my life, just knowing that. I thought they handled it phenomenally, but [it's] never fun to find out on your phone [...]. It didn't sit well with me."

Morris' feelings on the announcement being made on Tuesday: unapologetic

Morris may not have been aware that the news would break on Tuesday, but the head coach made it very clear he had no regrets for choosing not to wait to make the move official.

"Just to get it off our back, I don't want to coach games or players who believe in me and then not know what's going on," Morris said. "Whether that's wrong or different, I don't know. You can attack me if you want."

Morris' intentions for staying for the postseason: unchanged

The details of his move included that Morris would see his job through at North Texas for the season's entirety.

When asked directly, Morris clarified that he intends to stay with North Texas through its postseason play, regardless of the path. This implies he will remain with the Mean Green through the American Conference Championship, to be held Friday, Dec. 5, and whatever follows, whether it is the College Football Playoffs or a bowl game.

Morris' interactions with his players following the news: 'genuine'

When asked about how well he has communicated with his players, the head coach said he emphasized transparency over everything, both prior to and following the announcement.

"I told the team before our game today a story that only my wife and I know," Morris said. "I thought it was an important time for me to kind of open up with the guys and be able to [have] a growing and teaching moment bigger than football. I've always taken great pride in being a coach at this level, and I've turned down some opportunities to do some things in the NFL just because I think there's a mentorship stage in this that I truly enjoy in my life."

Editor's note: This article was originally published online and has been shortened for print. Read more at ntdaily.com.

At a Glance:

Women's Basketball

Mean Green women's basketball (5-2) will stay at home both on Nov. 3 to play No. 15 Oklahoma State and Nov. 6 to play Texas Southern amid its nonconference schedule. After those two Super Pit games, North Texas will have three more nonconference games prior to starting American Conference play on Dec. 30 against Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton, Florida.

Football

The newly ranked North Texas football team (11-1, 7-1) at No. 24 will face off fellow ranked American Conference team No. 20 Tulane (10-2, 7-1) this Friday in the American Conference Championship at 7 p.m. If the Mean Green or the Green Wave advance past the conference tournament, both ranked teams are seemingly slotted to appear in the College Football Playoffs whose first round will start Dec. 19-20. Tulane had been ranked back on Week 12 while North Texas recently earned its No. 24 ranking on Dec. 2. Both teams will see its postseason futures unveiled on Dec. 5.

Men's Basketball

The Mean Green men's basketball team (7-2) have sparked a four-game winning streak heading into a neutral court game at Dickies Arena versus Texas Christian University on Dec. 7. North Texas is currently undefeated at the Super Pit this season at 6-0 but 1-2 in its three away games. Its next match against TCU is one half of a doubleheader featuring Louisiana State University against Texas Tech whose head coach in Grant McCasland was once previously at North Texas.

No. 24 North Texas and No. 20 Tulane to battle in American Conference Championship for place in College Football Playoff

By Ian Pfaffenberger
Staff Writer

At the beginning of the season, the fourth-highest roster turnover in the nation and a projected eighth-place finish in the American Conference loomed over North Texas football.

Now, the team has a chance to secure its first-ever American Conference title and a potential trip to the College Football Playoff.

"It's surreal," senior offensive lineman Gabe Blair said. "I never thought we'd even get close to something like this. First couple years, we were just fighting to get in a bowl game. I never thought we'd get the chance to go to the college football playoff, so I'm just blessed."

For senior cornerback David Fisher, reaching the goal marks a year-long mission he set for the team back in fall camp, when he said appearing in the College Football Playoffs was a top priority.

"It's definitely heartwarming, because [...] some of them looked at me crazy [and] some of them bought in," Fisher said. "But now, everybody comes up to me, even in the locker room, [and are] like, 'You did say this was going to happen.'"

With the new 12-team playoff format, the five highest-ranked conference champions earn playoff bids. With there being four power conferences, a spot for the champion of the American seems assured.

That spot will be fought over between No. 24 North Texas (11-1, 7-1 American) and No. 20 Tulane (10-2, 7-1 American) in the Dec. 5 American Championship.

Both teams, however, sit in similar potentially sticky situations.

Just five days after the announcement of North Texas head coach Eric Morris' hiring at Oklahoma State, Tulane head coach Jon Sumrall was announced as the next head coach at the University of Florida. Both agreed to finish out their respective seasons, with the championship game being the final one for one of the two coaches at their programs.

The Mean Green football team will face off against Tulane in the American Conference Championship on Dec. 5 at Yulman Stadium in New Orleans, Louisiana. **Photo by Ismael Beltran**

While questions remain about which team advances to the CFP or a bowl game, even further questions remain about each program's recruitment for next season or the new leadership that will come after.

The combination of the postseason, coaching changes and Early Signing Day, all conflicting with one another, has led to what Morris said hurts high school players more than anyone else.

"Is it fair? Absolutely not. [...]," Morris said. "You see these guys that have done everything, right, and ultimately they might get punished for being loyal at some point, which makes no sense in the real scheme of life."

Morris said the conversations with North Texas-specific 2026 recruits have been difficult amid all the change.

"I'm going to keep those things private," Morris said. "They have not been easy, I'll kind of just leave it at that."

The Mean Green enter the American Football Championship as favorites, sporting the No. 1 scoring and total offense in the nation. A win over Navy (9-2, 7-1) and multiple 50-point bursts have highlighted the best North Texas season in program history.

The offensive explosions have been heavily created from the offensive trio of redshirt freshman quarterback Drew Mestemaker, freshman running back Caleb Hawkins and sophomore receiver Wyatt Young.

They became the second trio in program history to eclipse 3,000 passing yards, 1,000 rushing yards and 1,000 receiving yards, respectively, in a season. Additionally, Mestemaker won the conference's Offensive Player of the Year and Hawkins won Rookie of the Year.

As for Hawkins, Morris said the young player has an "old soul" and maturity that has helped him reach his dominant season of 1,216 rushing yards and 23 rushing touchdowns.

"I was asking the other day about a rap song that was on at practice, [...] and [Hawkins] said, 'Coach, I got no clue. I don't listen to music. [...],'" Morris said. "He said [...] I listen to some worship music before the games, and that's the only time I listen to music."

Tulane, on the other hand, is coming off its fourth-straight winning season, along with its third double-digit season win total in that span.

The Green Wave has been successful this season through its dominant offensive line play and run-pass option offense. Junior quarterback Jake Retzlaff presents a dual threat for opposing defenses, leading the team in both passing and rushing along with 28 total touchdowns, split evenly 14-14 between passing and rushing.

With 14 weeks of a remarkable season for both the Mean Green and Green Wave come and gone, there is only one obstacle remaining before reaching the playoffs — each other.

Amid the uncertainty surrounding the next few weeks, Morris mentioned his desire to aid whoever is hired as the Mean Green's next coach, hoping to usher in a new era of North Texas football following his departure.

"I think that I'll spend some time hopefully, if Jared [Mosley] will allow me, with whoever he hires as the new head coach [...]," Morris said. "Hopefully it'll help them out to kind of give them some insight of, you know, maybe the good, bad and ugly."

Letter from the Editor: Looking back on a semester of growth

LETTER continued from page 1

Janese Mashell flourished in her role as Page Designer, taking on new page layouts and designs in stride. Her flexibility and learning ability have been incredible to watch. Mashell has proven time and again that she can take on whatever challenge comes her way.

Arts & Life/The Dose Editor Matthew Winter told stories from across Denton, finding people and events that capture the city's feeling. I can not wait to see what he accomplishes next, with his eye for uniqueness, in a town that has something new every week.

The news desk at the *Daily* is always tricky, but News Editor Shehzil Imran handled a slightly tumultuous semester with grace, after switching to a solo-editor position from a two-man editing team. As she finishes her first semester at the university as a transfer student and at the *Daily*, I look forward to seeing how she hones her skills.

Sports Editor Justin Na has spent the last four months reinventing the sports section into a whole new beast. Drawing on his knowledge from MeanGreen 247, he has made the section something new. Na has catapulted the *Daily*'s sports section to be where fans and others alike come to first, and I am excited to see how he will continue to grow as a reporter and an editor.

Alejandra Osegueda, in her second semester as Opinion Editor, has fostered the section to have a bit more bite. Passing on her own skills to balance research and opinion in every piece to her writers, Osegueda has crafted a section I hope to see continue to evolve.

Photo Editor Ismael Beltran has shown true progress as a leader with every assignment taken or doled out. A continuous advocate for his photographers, his leadership has sewn the seeds that will transform our photographers into photojournalists.

Virtually a one-man machine, Video Editor Cooper Collins took on nearly all video assignments solo this semester, balancing technical knowledge and editing on top of other responsibilities.

Illustrations Editor Victoria Maldonado brought a truly artistic touch to the position this semester, with artists across media types submitting some of the most visually interesting illustrations I have seen at the *Daily*.

Our copyediting duo, Baylee Cantrell and Samantha Heath, have handled the undertaking of editing this semester with dexterity, shifting between sections and remembering rules like living, breathing Associated Press Style machines.

I would like to additionally thank our faculty advisor, Randy Loftis. His guidance throughout this semester has been crucial, and his door has always been open when I needed it. He has been there through the highs and the lows of my tenure as editor-in-chief and I am forever grateful.

Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank the volunteers at the *Daily*. The volunteer staff, whom I was a part of not too long ago, are truly the backbone of the paper. Without the hard work and dedication of our volunteers, we would not have an edition every week. I am ecstatic to see the tradition pass on to the next set of *Daily* reporters.

I am immensely thankful to have been allowed to lead this staff and to have learned what I have from serving as this paper's editor-in-chief.

As I look back on my time at the university, I see it in relation to the *Daily*: 10 semesters, more than 80 stories, tens of photographs and thousands of hours of reporting and writing. I am looking forward to my next chapter, but I will never forget what a home the *Daily* has been for the last three and a half years.

Editor-in-Chief Gianna Ortner-Findlay poses for a photo on top of a *North Texas Daily* newsstand on Dec. 2, 2025.
Photo by Aiden Gonzalez

Americans should reconsider who they buy from this holiday season

By Raegan Barrett
Staff Writer

With the annual festivities around the corner, many people are struck with the impulse to buy without thinking of whose pockets they are lining. Serious reconsideration of consumption is needed this holiday, as big corporations continually prove they do not deserve Americans' hard-earned cash.

The recent government shutdown has left civil servant households struggling to regain their financial stability, despite the government's reopening on Nov. 13, after over a month without receiving a single paycheck from federally funded jobs.

Even outside government positions, citizens have reported worsening economic instability since the current Trump administration took office, leading to a rise in the "paycheck-to-paycheck" culture.

However, in the face of the wreckage, people have continued to push through to make this holiday as routine as possible for themselves and their loved ones. This is being done by decorating, cooking and most prevalently, buying, with Americans starting holiday purchasing early in October.

By reflex, most turn to big corporations such as Amazon, Apple and Walmart for quick and easy shopping. With national brands' alluring deals and convenient discounts they present like the obvious choice for seasonal shopping. While they are tempting, financially supporting these companies also supports their practices, which have become increasingly corrupt over the years.

Illustration by Victoria Maldonado

Although some of these corporations faced disruptions from the government shutdown, their losses are a drop in the bucket compared to those of the average struggling household.

It has grown increasingly clear that these billion-dollar companies do not value those who keep them in operation.

According to Green America, names like Amazon and Walmart fail to provide proper safety measures and pay raises to their exhausted workers. Even amid the current staggering economy, provoking union outcry for the most basic financial courtesy.

Other brands, such as Coca-Cola, are becoming infamous for exploiting customers through price increases while simultaneously funding causes that run counter to the public interest, such as environmentally unsustainable production practices.

Continuously funding their greedy agendas should not be on society's wishlist, as it only serves to show that big businesses can get away with anything and continue to swindle their customers and employees alike.

While families can not avoid these companies altogether, as they often maintain an enormous presence in the standard community, other sources could be used as substitute options for holiday purchases.

One of the simplest and cheapest alternatives is thrifting. Despite some regarding giving a formerly owned item as a gift as a faux pas, thrifting is a great way to save and find a thoughtful gift. Thrifted finds can make unique, one-of-a-kind gifts at a low price point compared to less exclusive pieces found in retail stores.

If in search of something new, shopping at smaller businesses is also an exceptional alternative, often offering eccentric products from local sources while supporting local shops.

Denton, for example, offers many small businesses ranging from vintage media at Faded Blue to trendy boutiques like The Palm Tree.

In today's materialistic world, it is easy to forget the importance of spending time with loved ones rather than giving them the latest items, and there is no better way to correct this than through experience.

Whether it comes in the form of family trips, cooking classes or spa weekends, the gift of activity should not be underestimated, as it will continue to regift itself through the fun memories and stories it comes along with.

This year, Americans should stick to simple buying and put massive corporations on the naughty list to push funds back into the hands of the people.

Consumers can demonstrate the sheer weight of the American dollar and wield it away from the ever-greedy corporate giants.

Despite these enterprises being perceived as the more "convenient" option during the holiday season, these companies have an impact on society, and there should be mindfulness about which companies ones' money funds.